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UNCLAS ANKARA 006208

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EB TPP/ABT/BTT DEBORA MALAC, JACK BOBO
STATE FOR IIP/T/ES JONATHAN SHAFFER
USDA FOR FAS/QA/BIG PAUL SPENCER
USDA FOR FAS/ICD SEAN CARMEDY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ETRD](#) [EAGR](#) [KPAO](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: Ag Minister Issues Strong Anti-Biotech Statement

Ref: A. Ankara 00801, B. Ankara 005980

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¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY. TODAY'S TURKISH DUNYA NEWSPAPER (A BUSINESS DAILY), REPORTED THAT TURKEY'S MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE SAMI GUCLU VISITED THE "MONSTER TOMATO BALLOON" IN ANKARA YESTERDAY. THE GIANT TOMATO, AS PART OF A NATION WIDE ANTI-GMO CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN TOURING TURKEY FOR SEVERAL WEEKS NOW. THIS BALLOON WAS ORGANIZED AND EXHIBITED BY THE 'NO' FOR GMO'S PLATFORM, WHICH WAS FORMED BY 90 NGOS. IN HIS STATEMENTS, THE MINISTER INDICATED THAT THE GOT WILL BE INCREASING ITS CONTROL OF GMO IMPORTS AT CUSTOMS. DESPITE THE TONE OF THESE STATEMENTS, THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE IS MOST LIKELY ATTEMPTING TO SEND A SIGNAL TO CONSUMERS THAT THE GOT IS IN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION. NO IMMEDIATE DISRUPTION IN TRADE IS ANTICIPATED, ALTHOUGH PER REFTEL, NEW LEGISLATION THAT MAY BE APPROVED BY PARLIAMENT IN AS LITTLE AS TWO TO THREE MONTHS HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE QUITE DISRUPTIVE.

¶12. (SBU) IN HIS REMARKS, MINISTER GUCLU UNDERLINED THAT CURRENTLY IMPORTS OF GMO PRODUCTS, EXCEPT SEEDS, ARE PROHIBITED. NOTE. BY SEEDS, THE MINISTER IS LIKELY REFERRING TO GRAINS SUCH AS CORN AND SOYBEANS. IMPORTS OF GMO PLANTING SEEDS ARE FORBIDDEN. FURTHER, THERE ARE ACTUALLY NO CONTROLS FOR GMO CONTENT IN PROCESSED FOODS. END NOTE. HE ALSO ADDED THAT, CONSIDERING THE SENSITIVITY OF THE PUBLIC ON THIS ISSUE, THE GOT IS IMPROVING ITS LABORATORY INFRASTRUCTURE, AND WILL SEARCH FOR THESE PRODUCTS AT CUSTOMS. THE MINISTER STATED THAT CONFIRMATION FROM THE SUPPLIER COUNTRY FOR GMO CONTENT WILL BE REQUIRED, AND THAT THE GOT WILL ALSO ASK IMPORTING COMPANIES TO ANALYZE THESE PRODUCTS AT GOT LABORATORIES (AT THEIR OWN EXPENSE) FOR GMO CONTENT.

¶13. (SBU) TODAY AG ATTACHE MET WITH DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY HASAN EKIZ TO RAISE CONCERN OVER THE MINISTER'S STATEMENT, AND PROVIDE FURTHER INFORMATION FROM A PREVIOUS REQUEST. NOTE. DR. EKIZ WAS AN ATTENDEE AT THE SECRETARY'S SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY SEMINAR IN CALIFORNIA LAST YEAR. END NOTE. DR. EKIZ, WHO INDICATED THAT HE IS IN SUPPORT OF BIOTECHNOLOGY, IS ALSO HIGHLY KNOWLEDGEABLE ON THE TOPIC. TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, DR. EKIZ DOWNPLAYED THE MINISTER'S STRONG REMARKS BY INDICATING THAT THE AGRICULTURE MINISTRY WAS OBLIGED TO CONVEY PUBLICLY TO CONSUMER GROUPS THAT THEY WERE TAKING ACTION TO DEVELOP BIOTECHNOLOGY REGULATIONS. DR. EKIZ INITIALLY CONFIRMED THAT THE GOT WOULD NOT COMPLETELY BLOCK IMPORTS. SUBSEQUENT STATEMENTS, HOWEVER, INDICATED THAT THE TOLERANCE LEVELS ESTABLISHED BY TURKEY THROUGH THE PENDING LEGISLATION MIGHT 'TEMPORARILY' BE QUITE RESTRICTIVE.

¶14. (SBU) COMMENTS. WHILE IT WAS ENCOURAGING TO MEET A GOT BUREAUCRAT WHO WAS KNOWLEDGEABLE ON THE TOPIC, THE PERSISTENT NEGATIVE PRESS AND CAMPAIGN OF THE 'NO' TO GMO PLATFORM HAS TURNED THIS INTO A POLITICAL ISSUE, AND NOT A SCIENTIFIC ONE. IN THE DEPUTY SECRETARY'S OWN WORDS, THE AGRICULTURE MINISTRY IS IN A VERY DIFFICULT SITUATION. PER REFTEL B., FUTURE LEGISLATION IS LIKELY TO ADDRESS THE POLITICAL ELEMENT FIRST, AND CONSIDER ECONOMIC AND SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS SECONDARY. END COMMENTS.

¶15. POST WILL REPLY SEPTEL TO STATE (#228322) REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS TO FUND SPEAKERS AND SPECIALISTS TO VISIT TURKEY. SUCH PROGRAMS ARE NEEDED IN TURKEY, BUT NEED TO BE COORDINATED CAREFULLY WITH THE GOT AND LOCAL FOOD AND FEED ASSOCIATIONS.

EDELMAN